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**Saint Thomas Evangelical Lutheran Church, Bloomington, Indiana**

**Yes, God Hears!**

**Luke 2:1-20 NRSV, emended**

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom God favors!"

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart.

The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

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At the beginning of the story, we located the day of Jesus's birth—its place in history, while attempting to acknowledge that we don't come here today only to *remember* something that happened a long time ago—to recall and reenact something from the past. We come to witness something that is happening among us today. That Christ's coming wasn't once but always. The message of the angels, which the shepherds amplify with joy

in spite of their fears, tells of a God who comes again and again and again and again into human life in order to bring peace, goodwill to all people.

The world in which Jesus was born was filled with pain, poverty, and power struggles. The open words of the story of his birth point to the pain of occupied people—forced to move, to be registered, to crowd together in unsanitary conditions. I mean, Jesus really was born in a barn! But the fear and anxiety of this time is palpable. We can hear the prayers to heaven beseeching God: Tear open the heavens! Come down! Break this yoke! Bend this rod! Fuel the fire of our passion for justice! Are you even listening?

So, here we are. The second COVID Christmas. In a year that saw riots in our Capitol, trials for police who shot unarmed Black people, the collapse of life in Afghanistan when US troops pulled out, wildfires, floods, tornados. The anxiety of our age weaves through our lives until our fear is palpable. Dear God, are you even listening? Save us!

And so, when the angels appear to the shepherds in the Bethlehem fields, I nearly laugh! Do not be afraid! But something in what the angels said make field-hardened, sleepy shepherds race to Bethlehem. Something made them return glorifying and praising God. Something stirred the heart of Mary.

The angel's announcement used the words of power. The angel delivers a royal birth announcement in the form that could have announced the birth of a new Caesar or a lesser royal, good news declared to all people which only brought joy to a few. But what the angel said—what the angel said about the sign. Not that it would be wrapped in riches and laid in the seat of power, but wrapped in regular-old swaddling cloths and lying in a cattle trough. This isn't peace enforced with sword and spear and crosses. This is a word that yes, God sees! Yes, God hears!

And so Beloved, tonight, the angel's message is for you. Do not be afraid. See, there is good news of great joy for all people. Christ comes. Christ comes in the joy of children. Christ comes in the care of neighbors. Christ comes in unexpected welcomes, in communities who throw open their doors to refugee, immigrant, and outsider. Christ comes in the tenderness of a nurse for her patient. Christ comes when all seems lost. Christ comes when we hope against hope.

Amen.